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AUTHOR Takahashi, Sarii Sally
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ABSTRACT

When a popular high school principal was reassigned under difficult circumstances, the school's culture was torn apart. A narrative of how this happened and how the principal's successor was able to heal the rift is provided in this report. The paper provides details of the actions that led up to the board reassigning the principal and the outcry that followed. The narrative discusses how the school was divided; how many parents, faculty, and students demanded a recall of the board members who voted to reassign the principal; and how a culture of suspicion arose during these tense times. The narrative details the hiring of the new principal, the application process, characteristics of a high school principal, the work a new principal would have to do to unite the school, the strategies used to select a principal, the ways to recognize a "healer," and the ways the new principal united the school. The paper then offers an analysis of the situation, asking why the school community had developed such a devotion to the original principal and how the new principal, by allowing herself to be defined by the school, was able to unite the school's stakeholders. (RJM)

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The Keeper of the House: Principal Succession and the Mending of the Hearts

Sarii Sally Takahashi
School of Education
University of California, Riverside
sarii@juno.com

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S. Takahashi

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Abstract

In 1995 a popular high school principal was voted to be reassigned after being accused of not filing a police report when a student reported being sexually molested by a teacher. Given that this principal had essentially built the school and its culture while maintaining its high morale, many community members, faculty, and students were in disbelief. In addition, circumstances surrounding the incident were unclear. Claims stating that the principal neglected to file a report were made, but at the same time local newspapers printed statements from the County Sheriff's Department reporting that proper procedures were taken and an arrest was not made. Hence, inconsistencies in the information surrounding the removal of the principal led to a board recall. Teachers, students, parents, and community members wore black armbands and carried signs and chanted while the cheerleading squad yelled, "R-E-C-A-L-L. Recall!" at the three board members who voted for the transfer. Essentially the school was split and the community was "butting heads" with one another.

The school was left in a vulnerable condition- divided, hurt, and in need of a new principal. Standard hiring practices were put in place for selecting candidates to be interviewed. But at the interview responses to questions were evaluated based upon the context of the school- toxicity flowed throughout the school and the faculty, students, and community were hurt. A new principal was needed- one who could heal the wounds. The school was not in need of a dictator, charismatic leader, or disciplinarian- and the hiring committee was aware of this. Julia, who was once a shy, young, unhappily married agoraphobic girl afraid to leave her house, was tapped to apply for the position. Now, as a young woman, having moved up the ranks into the central office she held the character of a nurturer, silent leader, and decision-maker. The strength that Julia had once found within herself and her personal growth made her a perfect match for a wounded school that strived to once again stand on its own two feet.

Introduction

In 1995 a vote to have a popular principal removed from a rural high school lead to a recall. Activities leading up to the recall left a community and school divided and in turmoil. The purpose of this paper is to investigate how a successful principal succession was made possible. Focus is placed on the context of the school and the need to find a healer.

First, the circumstances surrounding the reassignment of the principal is discussed. Next principal hiring procedures are presented. Then, strategies for finding a person who fits the context are explored. And the new principal's role at the school is explained. Later sections of the paper, deal with factors surrounding the context that helped to define who the appropriate successor would be.

Greenville High School

I remember the ray of sunlight shining through the green leaves of the tall trees as I walked through campus with Principal Julia Morris. It was lunch time and students were walking through the courtyard laughing and talking with one another. Faculty members were waving their hand in our direction from afar and students greeted the principal as we walked by. It is hard to imagine- two years ago this very same place was in complete turmoil.

Why the turmoil?

People filled the gym stomping their feet in protest to a 3-2 board vote to have the Greenville High School Principal reassigned. Teachers, students, parents, and community members wore black armbands and carried signs and chanted while the cheerleading squad yelled, "R-E-C-A-L-L, Recall!" at the three board members who voted for the transfer. Approximately seventy speakers came to the podium to speak, majority of which asked Elder to remain at Greenville High (Sun Times: Oct., 3, 1995).

As described in an interview:

> "… there was constant uproar, the worst I had seen in thirty years. Just constant uproar. The gymnasium with about 1000 people just stomping, shouting and stuff… teachers attacking teachers through no fault of the principal. The principal who left was fine. There was some politics in the community…"

In terms of the relationship among the teachers a Greenville High School teacher observed that:

> "I think it did fragment the teachers because there were some who supported the principal and some who didn't and there were a little bit of splintering I think among a fraction of the faculty. . . I think what had happened was that the attitude on the part of the teachers might be hey we just, hey we're butting heads against the stone wall and I am not going to do anything extra with regards to helping the kids or really from the stand point of helping the school district itself."

The Assistant Superintendent of Student Services reports that:

> "Well you could just tell with the staff. They didn't like the staff members they weren't happy. They were complaining, parents were complaining. It was parents against parents, ya know recall against board members, against non-recall. Ya know parents would come to the board meeting and the recall would stand up to tell how bad the board was and the anti-recall would stop and tell how wonderful the board was and it just had to be stopped and be healed (Assistant Superintendent Student Services)."

And lastly, Principal Morris explains:

> "…they had tried a board recall and there were some people who absolutely opposed the recall but most faculty were in favor of it and they just went to the point of war with each other, hatred with each other, some screaming in the hallway at each other, so unprofessional."

Hence, the split among the school, and the 'toxicity'- as described by a community member- was evident in the behavior among faculty, staff, students, parents, and the community.

<u>What were the circumstances surrounding the reassignment</u>?

From the interviews it was apparent that the public was not aware of underlying political factors that contributed to the reassignment of Principal Elder. Basically, "the board never said why they wanted to transfer Elder, citing the confidentiality of personnel decisions" (Sun Times:

Oct. 3, 1995). Therefore, the public had to rely on newspaper articles to get a true understanding of why the majority of the board voted to remove Principal Elder from Greenville High School.

Based upon newspaper articles the best indication the public had been given for the removal of Elder is that, ". . . Elder has been accused of not filing a police report when a student reported being sexually molested by a teacher, a claim that Elder denies" in addition to ". . . not acting quickly enough to solve financial problems in the band" (Sun Times: Oct. 3, 1997). Although not acting immediately on both a financial and sexual misconduct complaint (Sun Times: Oct. 10, 1995) was a valid reason to dismiss the principal, the public was disconcerted because it was also reported that:

> ". . . he (Elder) recognizes his responsibility to report such accusations, and in this case he reported it in a timely manner to the Streamway County Sheriff's Department, to the district personnel office, and to the superintendent. The Streamway County Sheriff's Department spokesman, Matthew Gordon, said several reports have been filed on that particular case" (Sun Times: Oct. 3, 1995).

Also, it was later reported:

> "District Administrator, Bob Heal, said Elder's verbal report to the Streamway County Sheriff's Department was more than adequate under California law. The case was closed without any arrest" (Sun Times: Oct. 14, 1995).

Information was not clear regarding the circumstances surrounding the board's vote to reassign the principal. Everybody basically relied on their intuition of what was true and openly voiced their opinions.

Why was it that Principal Elder received so much support?

Even with all the uncertainty, without hesitation community members, teachers, parents, and students faithfully supported Principal Elder. Essentially, as explained by a teacher at Greenville High School:

> "He was the original principal and he had worked for a year or so prior to the opening of school with all this stuff going on and took about to get the staff together to work with

> the architect and all the building things and all the things you have to do when you're building a new school. . . when we first came we only had ninth and tenth graders; when we started out which is a normal pattern for starting schools and I thought the kids at that particular time (as opposed to) talking about the kids right now were very immature. They didn't really have the seniors and juniors to kinda help them develop and so that particular (group) were very immature and there were a lot of problems I think in terms of the culture at least from the stand point of the school. Ugh the staff that was assembled I think was outstanding staff; I think a top notch staff. . . Well, I think amongst the faculty and the students were a caring attitude on the part of the majority of the teachers. I think there is a lot of interaction I think that teachers go out of their way to make sure that students succeed. And that's my opinion there."

Basically Principal Elder was there at the school site a little over eight years ago, building a foundation and structure for a school with a future- a school that had not yet been built.

As explained by Principal Morris:

> "When the principal was removed they had just come off a very good year. They had just got a six year accreditation. They were proud. They were starting their academic achievement program called Renaissance. Then boom, October 2 he was removed. It had been brewing for a while, part of it was a music director, but I know that there was a lot more behind the scenes that no faculty member knows, but the fact that they removed him triggered the board recall."

In addition, the Sun Times (Oct. 3, 1995) reports that:

> "Students praised Edler's willingness to attend concerts and competitions and his way of paying attention to each individual student. Teachers said he had spearheaded academic programs that steer students toward college and life. And many speakers mention the school's six year accreditation from the Western Association of school and colleges, the highest awarded."

For those who supported the board recall, Principal Elder was viewed as the builder of the school and the person who had lead them through many accomplishments. The vote for his reassignment was viewed as an entrapment in some political scheme.

As stated in the newspaper, Gary Heck, a teacher who Elder had dismissed two years ago was thought to be ". . . organizing the move to get Elder transferred" (Sun Time: Oct. 17, 1995). Heck had been accused of ". . . making obscene telephone calls, sending anonymous letters, and

even slashing tires or shooting up the houses of people responsible for his ouster" (Sun Times: Oct. 3, 1995). Even at the gymnasium, when people gathered to protest, it is reported that Heck was present staring at every speaker who spoke out on behalf of Elder, as they walked down the aisle to the podium. In addition, one of the trustees who had voted to have Elder reassigned- a nineteen years old- Samantha Jacobs was accused of being romantically involved with Heck.

Why was it that the board was set on reassigning Principal Elder?

Although Edler's supporters strongly believed sufficient evidence of misconduct on behalf of the principal was not presented the board stood firm on their decision. The board continued to focus on the parent complaints about Elder's disregard to immediately take action against the band teacher who had been accused of both financial and sexual misconduct (Sun Times: Oct. 23, 1995). The teacher had collected $6700 for a Las Vegas field trip and then had no money to pay for the hotel bill. In another instance, it is reported that he molested one of his fifteen years old students while in the hotel room during another field trip. Regardless of the statements made by district administrators, in terms of Elder's timeliness to report the misconduct, a concern that remains unanswered is, "Why did administration leave an alleged child molester on campus for 96 days plus" (Sun Times: Oct. 10, 1995)?

How did this endanger the board and district office?

A recall over this issue would cost the district up to $80,000. Therefore, supporters of Elder asked the three trustees who voted, "Yes," to put in a resignation. Those who opposed the recall were asking the other two trustees to resign. A parent even complained about the Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent: "Superintendent Barbara Winters and personnel chief Kevin Carter should be suspended until their role in the controversy can be determined" (Sun Times: Oct. 17, 1995).

The board and the district office were being scrutinized. In order for everyone to protect themself people began to question one another. For example, one board member questioned Superintendent Winters' and Assistant Superintendent Carter's duties of removing the band teacher when allegations were first made on May 11 and a letter to the superintendent followed on August 15. Eventually, throughout the school district people felt threatened. Even at the school level, as described by a teacher:

> "There were times we felt like everything we did was being scrutinized, anything that might happen... it was gonna be in the paper. We didn't know whether the school board or superintendent was going to support the teacher's position based on what we had. If this principal were to be moved we could be moved also. There were some other things that happened- there were a lot of things that happened... there was a lot of things that happened."

So, basically the district and school were left fragmented unable to trust one another.

The Hiring of a New Principal

Principal Elder was transferred and the school was left wounded. The assistant principal was assigned as interim principal and remained until the district office determined what would be done to replace a popular principal.

What was the application process?

According to an interview with the Assistant Superintendent of Personnel, the standard procedures for hiring a principal is as follows:

> "Well, the normal procedures would be to prepare a job announcement...It's a standard job announcement which we post in our schools and it'll go out to colleges and universities. That's normally supplemented with what is most effective, that is an ad in the statewide job announcement service in the Ed Cal. I don't know if you've ever seen that before. . . I have one down here. . . This is one you can take. This is a newspaper that is put out by the Association of California School Administrators. It has a lot of things in it but one of the things is a job information survey, this is where jobs are posted statewide this goes from Eureka to Blythe. They are listed according by category, by district, by ADA and so on and this is where you get all your circulation publicity, this is where most of the applicants for most jobs come from. This is from JIS part of the management procedure is to list the job with JIS. They require and we also add a period

> of time after the job is listed and the job is open at least two weeks til people get applications in and at the conclusion of the application period applications are collected the job is closed and anything that comes in after that week are excluded. Applications that met the deadline are screened. All of the screening is done by district administration and usually the superintendent plays a key role in that. Of the applicants that have been received our process is to invite six or seven of them for an interview. An interview is normally, when I say normally we're talking about high school principal we don't do this too often, with the superintendents, two assistant superintendents, couple teachers from the school involved and generally a board member. That's the way we did it in the position you are asking about. The referent interviewers conduct a reference check and our decision is made and an offer is made and the person is hired. At times we've done it other ways we've had different interest groups around the community and the people would move one room from another to talk to students, to talk to parents, to talk to teachers or what ever we've done other ways. The most recent one was the way I described it to you. . . Each interview was about an hour."

In regards to the screening process- the initial screening process:

> "Well, you're looking for a… you eliminate people who don't have the basic credential, obviously they should have some relevant experience, the paper work should look good, it should be clean that sort of stuff…That was the formal process."

Once the screening process is complete, the next step is determining who will make a 'good' principal.

<u>What are characteristics of high school principal?</u>

As indicated by the Assistant Superintendents the duties of a high school principal are vast and difficult.

> "The high school principal is perhaps if not the most difficult administrative position in the district at least one of the top two or three of the most difficult positions in the district. Um, well it's incredibly time consuming… there are constant decisions one has to make as a principal. There is little time to think about them or illuminate. The responsibility covers everything from safety on campus to academic integrity of courses. You're such a high profile person you are constantly being challenged. Your judgment is always being challenged. You're dealing with 90 or 100 very bright, intelligent, and well educated people, some of whom have their own personal agendas some of them who are polarized in to different groups and you have a task of trying to bring these people together and move them towards a common goal it's a very difficult job (Assistant Superintendent of Personnel)."

> "I think the role of the principal, I think there are two roles- First you have to be an educational leader of the school, you have to know curriculum, you have to know what a good classroom looks like, you have to know what needs to go at the school in order for the children to learn, so you have to be an educational leader. The second thing is that

> you have to be a people person. You have to be able to solve problems. You can't go around campus and because you don't like this teacher or you don't like that teacher ignore them and only deal with or associate with teachers that you like. You have to work with the teachers that you don't necessary like. You have to bring them into the group. You have to make them part of the solution to any problem. They have to feel like they are part of the school. You have to bring them in; so, you have to be a people person to be able to solve problems (Assistant Superintendent of Education Services)."
>
> "The first thing I look for is the ability for the person to get along with people. That is much for me more critical than the knowledge a person has. You can teach a person knowledge, a person can gain knowledge, but if they are not people oriented they are not able to work with people. It isn't all the knowledge they have- it won't work. They have to be able to communicate with people and solve problems. To me that is the most important attribute of a principal (Assistant Superintendent of Education Services)."

Based upon these criteria it is believed that the interim principal was capable of becoming the principal, but-

> "He did a good job, but his fate was sort of sealed because he was kind of tied to the old administration and I don't think he had a chance to be interviewed for the position. So he was kinda with the old administration and I think on the part of the school board (the attitude) was we need to remove them all. But in my own mind he did a really good job under the type of circumstances but he kinda realized where he was and basically did a good job knowing I just gotta kind of maintain right here and he didn't try to lead us down any new course. He kinda just maintained us until it settled. But it was quite a turmoil time- (Greenville High School Teacher)."

Therefore, it is evident that the context plays a role in determining what type of person will make a 'good' principal.

<u>How are they going to pick up the pieces?</u>

Considering the circumstances:

> "In this particular case it was to take a faculty that had been wounded a little bit because of the turmoil and the unstable situation that had been prevalent at the school for a year or so, a year and a half maybe, and be able to have what it would take to guide us. To bring us together and even do some healing. So that was the thing, um certainly from my own standpoint it wasn't that I was looking for a disciplinarian… it wasn't that I was looking for someone with charisma, it wasn't that I was looking for a woman or a man to do this job. It wasn't that I was looking for a minority principal. It was strictly a matter of picking a person that was right for the time (Greenville High School Teacher)."

It was also determined that a person outside of the district better suited the position.

> "I think before we post we always look to see if there isn't an easily recognized insider to be appointed. We have appointed administrators, we have appointed principals without advertising and we will continue to do that. What we don't believe in is advertising for something that is wired or just a sham. We have appointed a school principal, we have appointed high school principal without advertising. In this case it was not given to, it was determined that we need to go outside. There needs to be an outsider there isn't anyone inside the district that can do the job (Assistant Superintendent of Personnel)."

Hence, the informal process of finding applicants became the procedure for hiring.

> "The informal process was we knew, we needed to get a principal. There weren't that many applicants there. This is a job (for principal) that is posted right now it has been posted for some time, maybe there are six to eight applications in the folder a quick perusal of it doesn't turn up anything right now. Last year we were very concerned that we get quality. And sometimes you have to go out and recruit a little bit. That's what I did with Julia. I reached out and tapped her -sort of speaking- through another person that's why Julia came in. She got the word that we would like to get her application and that was through somebody I know that knows her. So that's how...(Assistant Superintendent of Personnel)."

So, in order to ensure that the applicant pool remain strong Julia was brought into the competition. At this point, each of the applicants had satisfactorily provided verification of fulfilling the formal requirements (i.e., administrative credential, etc.) for the position. Hence, the concern was not the applicant responses to the standard application form. The real test for determining who would be the most qualified person to be principal of Greenville High School would be determined by factors that could not be captured on paper.

> "There are a lot of very specific things like I've mentioned and there are also a lot of intangible things that may be sort of hard to measure but you carry them around with you. As a person and... ability to get along with other people, ability to deal with complex situations, ability to handle ambiguity. . . No we can't see that. . . if we know that person, obviously we will know if they have those sorts of quality, but you can't see that on paper, those are not the kinds of things you measure on paper. Those are sorts of things you pick up on an interview or a reference check or perhaps you're going to learn about them later (Assistant Superintendent of Personnel)."

> "In the fact that we had to have a principal who could bring people together. The staff was divided over the other principal. The community was divided. We had to have a principal who could bring the community and staff together (Assistant Superintendent of Education Services)."

During the first year the hope was:

> "Some peace and quiet. We really wanted somebody that would be the type of person I had mentioned to you after a very popular principal (Assistant Superintendent of Personnel)."
>
> "That we would have the ability to begin to heal those hurts that had occurred. And to go to everybody and say, 'Ya know what is in the past is in the past you are important to me you are important to the school and we are going to work together' (Assistant Superintendent of Education Services)."

Thus the main concern was to find a principal that could reunite the school and community and heal the wounds.

What strategies are used to select a principal?

As reported by the Assistant Superintendent of Education Services:

> "It's hard to tell from the application I like to ask then of specific questions of what would you do in a specific situation. For instance if you were interviewing, I might ask you if you have two math teachers who are not cooperating with the chairperson of the math department. They don't get along. How are you going to solve that problem? To make sure that the math department cooperates with the chairperson and becomes a cohesive unit. I wouldn't want to know you just go in there and tell him. That is the person you do not want to hire. A person that has some skills- I would use these types of interpersonal skills, I would use some consensus building different ways that they may have for bringing those people together then we can say that person has come with good ideas, this just might work. They are not going in as a dictator and thinking because I am a principal what ever I tell people they have to do. So you try to ask questions that bring out their skills in dealing with problems and the solutions."

These situational questions are standard interview questions that do not necessarily have one correct answer, but there is an answer that is most suitable for the context.

How do you know when you have found a healer?

During the interviews differences in personalities were evident.

> "In terms of one of the interviewees, I think, was a disciplinarian and as part of his presentation and what he was trying to put over with us and project to us was I am a disciplinarian and I can straighten the school out. My feeling was that a disciplinarian was not needed. That there was not... discipline was not a problem as far as I was concerned. Whether it be discipline with the faculty members or disciplining the students. He was too much, too strong. Another person I felt was just maybe didn't have that little spark we needed in terms of personality to do the things we needed for

example- there were a couple of people who lacked the spark that we needed. We certainly weren't looking for a loud person we were just looking for someone who can do the job and I think we found that in terms of Julia- kind, easy going attitude."

Of all the interviewees, Julia presented herself as most fitting for Greenville High School:

> "First off she was acceptable to all the interest groups that were making the selection. So who ever was picked had to meet that sort of standard and the teachers there were looking for something, the board members were perhaps looking for something, the superintendent, myself may have been looking for other things which may not have been stated perhaps but they were all on our table and on our agenda. I was looking for someone who represented some of the qualities I had mentioned to you before… someone who can go into a very difficult situation and stir the water somebody who will be seen as an instructional leader and academic person, somebody who can stand up to the different interest groups and power groups that exist and occur on our campus someone with lots of energy and good ideas (Assistant Superintendent of Personnel)."

> "To be able to lead without being too strong- to lead in a low key sort of way I think people will follow in that way. I also believe that she is a caring person who will make things happen for you and I think she deals well with all these people that are trying to get a piece of her (Greenville High School Teacher)."

Although there was some concern,

> "In certain instances, yes. In some cases at least one person on the panel was concerned that this person was afraid that she'd have the teachers running her and running the show. The fact that this person couldn't just lead by being charismatic. A charismatic leader is not what we need, we need substance someone who stood for things that were not just charismatic qualities. And I again, that was the feeling for me because I believe the principal that was here before lead without those types of negative connotations in my own mind."

In the end, it was decided that Julia was the best candidate.

<u>How has Principal Morris United the School and Healed the Wounds?</u>

After the turmoil, the faculty and staff at Greenville High were ready for a change.

With the new principal starting

> ". . . my feeling is that there wasn't any resistance to her. I think early on that there were people who realized that she is strong enough and is strong enough to make tough decisions when she has to. . . I think for some people they are always hoping for change. There are elements in any faculty that are hoping for change when things didn't go well the first time. But I think for the most part the majority of the faculty just wanted to return to some degree of normalcy in terms of daily operating. . . I think what happened was that a lot of people liked the old principal. If there were- a large contingent that were loyal to him and they were very disappointed when it happened and he wasn't able

> to remain. And with the new principal, I think, once they realized that he wasn't coming back then they were pretty much ready to move on. Realize that it's water under the bridge and we need to move forward from this point. And I think they were willing to be open because there was enough time to do it. The interim principal allowed that time to happen and the months to pass so that she could step in and so we were ready for a new direction."
>
> "From a faculty member's standpoint we (the school) wanted somebody to come in and sort of smooth out the rough spots there was too much turmoil (Assistant Superintendent of Personnel)."

It is believed that Julia is accomplishing this:

> "She hasn't tried to make sweeping changes right away and that has given us sort of a little time to be stable about this .. so she didn't try to come in and clean house and she didn't try to come in and change routines tremendously and I think maybe that was just the honeymoon phase where she didn't want to move too quickly. And I think she will make her changes and I think she will do that. I think she returned us to stability and I think that sort of helped but I think internally she is quietly making changes and sees things differently which any principal would do."

Data Analysis

From the data it is clear that the school was left divided, high in anxiety, and uncertain about who they could trust. Why was it that Principal Elder had made such an impact on the community and members of Greenville High School? And what was it about Julia Morris that made her stand out as someone who could heal this wounded school?

Theoretical Framework

In Place and Placelessness, Relph (1976) explains the human significance, symbolism, and meaning of existential space. He argues:

> "That the significance of place in human experiences goes far deeper than this is apparent in the actions of individual groups protecting their own places against outside forces of destruction, or is known to anyone who had experienced homesickness and nostalgia for particular places: to be human is to live in a world that is filled with significant places: to be human is to have and to know your place" (p. 1).

Basically it is through space and our use of space to build towns, villages, houses, and schools that create experiences. These experiences are filled with symbols, signs, and intersubjective

experiences. Then from the individual, group, or consensus an image of that place and an identity is developed. Hence, 'the complex process of planning and constructing new schools makes a vital symbolic statement about community values and educational philosophy' (Ortiz, 1994, p. 9).

Principal Elder

The history of the place, Greenville High School, begins with a principal planning with architectures and teachers to develop a school that best fits the community and their children. The principal's reputation flourishes as the school is built and students fill the classrooms. Without the principal the school would be lonely and without the school the principal would not have a role within the community.

The structure defines the principal and the principal creates the reputation of the school. This principal who lays the foundation of Greenville High is Principal Elder. He visits with the community, teachers, and students- providing everyone with individualized attention. He is viewed as the keeper of the house, always striving to maintain a prestigious reputation for the new school. As Relph (1976) suggests, the principal is one with the inner structure of space and the people of the community have defined him as being a permanent part of the school.

When the outcome of the board vote, 3-2, to have the principal reassigned is made public teachers, parents, students, and the Greenville community are alarmed. They are unable to envision Greenville High School without Principal Elder. Immediately they protest and start a recall. The school is split and at war with one another. As explained by Ortiz (1994), "the institutions possess identities, statuses, or images that members want to establish or maintain" (p. 23). In this case, some of the members wanted to preserve the image of Greenville High School

as it was built and created by Principal Elder. While others felt that Elder's actions were not acceptable and wanted him removed.

Principal Morris

Nine months after the principal was removed another principal was brought in to heal the wounds. How was it that Principal Morris was able to replace a popular principal whose aura was the center of the school spirit?

Like Elder, Julia Morris also had a place within the school. Greenville High was not just any school. To her it was a place that would define her, a place she would call home. As Principal Morris recalls:

> "It was the school that pulled my heart; it was that particular school I had done some workshops there before and I thought way way back in my heart that this is the school that I'd like to be at."

From her enthusiasm and description of her first day at the school, it is obvious that to Principal Morris, Greenville High was more than just a school:

> "Um, my first- the first thing I did, well the very first thing the very first morning I got keys even before I started. I was real emotional about it, I was really excited… the athletic director had gotten the cheerleaders out to meet me at seven o'clock in the morning they did a cheer. I just, ya know, smelled that awful cow manure smell out there and saw the flies grubby all over and I thought, well- I am not at the county any more and this is okay by me. This is gonna be fun- the good and bad. I walked through the campus and it was filthy. In the building you could tell that no one was taking charge of making sure things looked nice; that supplies were put away and I was kinda appalled at the way that it was allowed to deteriorate."

Her concern for the maintenance of the building suggests that her interests are in the whole school, including presentation, not just the education of the students.

As she describes her role as principal, the oneness she feels with the position is evident:

> "I am kinda surprised that my personality fits the job even though I am surprised because I know myself from a little girl. I was extremely shy and you cannot be shy in this role. And I am not. I do a lot glad handing. Do you know what I mean by that? Hand shaking, a lot of meeting a lot of ya know, warm eyes into people's eyes. Maybe I grew

> out of a shy nature. I am not shy person at all any more, so that surprises me looking back on life. Actually there was period in my life when I was a young woman, first marriage, where I was very agoraphobic, I couldn't leave my house couldn't travel very far and I left the marriage and slowly, but surely grew out of that. . . All that was inside the person. It was a labyrinth of trying to get there. And every once in a while I stop and celebrate, I know that twenty five years ago. You go out Barn Street to get to my school and at the end of Barn Street was a 19 year old, married woman who wasn't doing very well and at this end of Barn Street on the freeway side is a 42 year old woman who is doing what she wants to do with her life. It's pretty powerful. . . It is a feeling I have experienced in smaller forms and I experience them around titles that I was proud to get. I was proud to get teacher when I became a teacher, I was proud to be assistant principal, I was proud to get the job at the county. Nothing so resonated in my heart as this. This is like in my school a match. When I was a little girl I wanted to be principal and I thought it was a pipe dream so this is like I even told my husband soon after getting the job that if anything happens to me now if we went traveling and the plane had crashed and I had died my life would not have been worth living up to that point. It was okay, but no, I had not fulfilled my dreams. But, he said but now that you have this role is it true that I can go to sleep in peace at night knowing that you did what you really dreamed of doing and I said, 'Absolutely.' And he can see it. He is really happy with the changes he sees in me. Which is- this is home."

Not only did Julia see herself as part of Greenville High School, but so did the interview committee:

> "I think that she had a background in consensus building and two other things that probably helped- Um, the school had had her a year before to come out and do some inservice with the school and they had really liked her and she had worked with- we had brought her into our district when we were working with our schools, teachers, parents, unions, to form mission statements and things for our district. Ya know goals and objectives. We brought her in, we didn't feel that it would be good for the superintendent, assistant superintendent of personnel, or I to be in charge we needed a person and she had come in a year before that also. (We were) impressed with her ability to get everybody to work together and pull together and get a solution."

Principal Morris had been a central person that contributed to the development of the mission statement of the district, which in turn lays the foundation for the goals of Greenville High. Hence, Principal Morris is a part of the history of the school. Not to mention she internalizes the values and goals of the mission statement.

Aside from finding a person who could be defined within the structure, it was important for the interview committee to find someone who could heal the wounds. Greenville High

needed someone who could lead with care. As Nel Noddings (1992) explains, everyone has a desire to be cared for it is a universal human characteristic. And to educate is not to preach, but it is to dialogue, listen, and be sensitive to the needs of others. As indicated in research, in terms of gender differences, women tend to behave more caring.

Based upon research on gender differences and speech patterns it is not surprising that the committee chose a woman to be principal. As stated in majority of the interviews, Greenville High did not need a disciplinarian or someone with a dominating personality. This suggests that a relational person that could focus on the group rather than individual needs was in demand.

Deborah Tannen (1996) explains that women are more relational. In their conversation they focus on the relationship among the people. Rather than speaking with "I" they characterize individual work by using "we". Their linguistic style presents itself as passive when compared to the dialoguing of men. This is because women tend to speak indirectly and seek negotiation rather than confrontation. These types of speech patterns and behaviors are present in Principal Morris' interview. By focusing on the "we" and "us" Principal Morris is able to take a fragmented school and turn it into a cooperative group.

Principal Morris began by meeting with teachers one-on-one to listen and offer her sensitivity:

> "When I started my first task, the first thing I assigned myself to do was to send a letter to all the staff inviting them in for twenty minute conversations. I started August 19th and I think I did my first conversations the next day. The letter invited people to come in and set up an appointment and many did. Some I guess- there was even a union question about that. Somebody called another union rep and said can she make us come in and talk to her and (the union responded) no she can't make you, but she is just inviting you to come. Eventually there were only two or three people I had to actually hunt down and pull in and say I need to talk to you; they are people who I have very very strongly, but surely brought next to me and they're very independent. What I picked up in the twenty minute conversation was the impression of the soul of the school. So it was much more based on what they said to me than it was my impression than it was what I saw other than that of the physical appearance of the place. . . What I did was take

> phrases from all of the interviews, put them on an overhead and at the first staff here's what everybody said, six pages of phrases and I just typed them out, what a wonderful staff, what a wonderful staff we have- we need to have some fun together and talk more and last year was hideous and we want to put it behind us and so this is what I wanted to do anyways. . . Year one I wanted to establish trust and stability. I am just getting to the exciting part which is a week from Friday we will have our first staff planning day and we are ready, I can see that we are ready; we have a facilitator coming in from another county office and he is going to take us through four hour processes to decide what are our major goals for our selves as well as our students and what we want for ourselves and what we want for our students really should be the same thing. Is it to be on time, is it to take responsibility, is it to know what your career center offers- he'll help us get to it."

The underlying purpose within the strategy Principal Morris takes in one-on-one conversations with faculty resembles finding in the review of literature on women in administration. These include: "(1) Women principals are generally more democratic in the way they operate in their schools (Wiles & Grobman, 1955; Hines & Grobman, 1956; Hemphill, Griffith & Fredericksen, 1962; Morsink, 1968), (2) Women principals display greater respect for the dignity of the teachers in their school (Wiles & Grobman, 1955), (3) Women principals have better and closer communication with teachers in their school (Wiles & Grobman, 1955), (4) Women principals speak and act more often as representatives of the group (Morsink, 1968), (5) Women principals maintain a more closely knit organization (Morsink, 1968), (6) Women principals are more effective at resolving conflicts with staff members (Morsink, 1968), (7) Women principals are less rigid in their response to school situations (Hines & Grobman, 1956), (8) Women principals are better at reconciling conflicting demands (Van Meir, 1973), (9) Women principals exhibit greater foresight in decisions they make and the action they take (Morsink, 1968), (10) Women principals more frequently review the results of actions they have taken (Hoyle, 1969), (11) Women principals exercise stronger leadership (Van Meir, 1973), and lastly (12) Women principals generally exhibit more effective administrative techniques (Hines & Grobman, 1956)" [cited in Fishel & Pottker, 1979].

Lastly, considering the school was left fragmented it was vital that the principal capable of playing a culture building role within the structure. As described by Deal and Peterson (1990) there are five themes in culture building: staffing, conflict, modeling, telling stories, and creating traditions, ceremonies, and rituals. For the remainder of the section, each of the five themes will be listed followed by an example of how Principal Morris fulfilled this theme.

(1) To begin, the principal must have a staff that shares the principal's values. And the principal needs to have skills to be able to identify individual values and determine whether it will weaken or strengthen the school. Principal Morris was able to identify those who were weakening the school culture and identified them as 'evil doers'. She was able to maintain a staff of people who supported the schools values. Here is an example of how 'evil doers' were dealt with:

> "One had the opportunity to resign. Circumstances were in the paper, but not all of it was in the paper. He was on tenure and it made it easier to just encourage him rather than for us to go through a whole legal process. Another was uh, oh- this one I was thinking of- oh, no he didn't leave but he had a lot of his reign tightened and shortened, okay- and he also just continued business as usual and I confronted him on it at a union meeting and I was able to institute a new way of business for him. Another one chose to go on leave and he has been on leave for a while. And we'll see how that one resolves itself. And were there others??? There've been a couple- one wasn't (an) evil doer but a little negative. Went to go work with another situation in the district and so did another. So- and these are real confidential what we are saying."

(2) Conflict must be openly examined and the resolution of conflict must be shared values.

> "It wasn't easy to see at first, but the more I got to know them the more I got a mental socio-gram, I finally found only really one classified employee who would sabotage me if she could, one certificated employee who really disappointed (me), and one guidance coordinator who said in a meeting, one of my goals was- I had made goals for the year and one of the goals was to open back conversations with the community and build a cushion of trust between the teachers and the school so that not everything aspirated to the district office. They were getting at least 15 calls a day Assistant Superintendent of Education Services told me about Rincoln High School and we don't get any now because we take care of our complaints. But one parent who came in very angry and I said we would sit down together all the players and let's hear our point of view. And she said some really mean things, no cursing and swearing but- when she left this guidance

> coordinator was really furious with me and she said Elder would of never stood for that, for us to sit in a room and for us to be talked to liked that. So I knew that the ghost for some people of what he did was right and I better be realistic about that."

In this case the principal allowed the parent to openly express her concern. The next example presents a conflict which needs to find resolution in shared grading values.

> "We had finished the semester and I had taken a look at all the grades and I had seen patterns of people who would give no A's and people who would given no F's. I just said, 'Where did we have our conversions about grading'. And we did this in small groups and (there was) possible discomfort about this. A lot of people coming in privately one by one to say what are you doing with this and where are we taking this because our last principal or our assistant principal was empowered to tell us that we couldn't give F's and most students shouldn't be failing. I don't know if that is what he really said, but that is how they interpreted it so they were really scared to death about the conversation about grades, so I would choose to not have that conversation next if I had a chance to do it over, but it's okay- it gave me a chance one-on-one, again to reassure them that really my favorite place is the tension between two extremes."

(3) The principal's actions count more than words.

> "Only because I had been around to so many schools only for that reason did I think I had a pretty good handle on what principal would mean. I hadn't been surprised. And I have made it a little more my style. My hours are extremely long because I will take time out for any staff member and however much time they need. I've learned a good little body language on how to help them not need more time than I have time to give. Your first part of the question is the question is the part that really interested me. Oh, how have I changed. When I went to the job interview I really wanted it and I really thought I could do it and I really didn't know for sure. This part of the year..."

(4) Sound interpersonal (storytelling) skills that connect to specific values. This is evident throughout the interview with Principal Morris. Through narratives she is able to explain and bring life to the setting.

When asked, if you were to describe a metaphor of the process is there one you could think of? Principal Morris responds:

> "Well- on my campus are trees like those right there. It has felt like that- we were in summer when I took the job and I was tired from the other job and I walked into a stressful environment. The stress was huge, but good stress, but so huge. Probably by winter and maybe even up until spring I looked maybe a little bit I had lost my leaves, but I wasn't dead at all. But now that I am feeling, just recently that I am coming into my own in this role and that people think of me as the same as the school not an outsider.

> It feels in my heart like I have my roots have unfold and I am ready to be a full tree. It is scary though to think that what will August and winter be like again. Will I go through all that again. I don't know, we'll see."

Through the metaphor she is able to present her oneness with the school and nature by comparing her journey to overcome her struggles with the trees of Greenville High School. Lastly, (5) the creating of tradition, ceremonies, and rituals is a task that Principal Morris is still in the process of completing.

Overall, Principal Morris was able to fit the school and begin the healing process because she allowed herself to be defined by the school, in addition to appearing as the "angel in the house" (Nodding, 1989, p. 59). She carries with her a 'law of kindness' and quiet strength. Lastly, she is able to develop a culture within the schools.

Conclusion

Gordon and Rosen (1981) report that not a lot is known about situational factors leading to succession. In this study events leading up to the succession of the principal are documented in the newspaper. The decision made as to the type of person hired was based upon the context. Although in this situation it was advantageous to hire a female with quiet strength, there is no evidence that a dominant male could not have also reunited the staff. There is not enough research on principal succession related to presuccesssion contexts to make comparisons. In addition, often times personnel matters remain confidential and gaining access is impossible.

Appendix A

Methodology

For the presentation of this data location and names are masked and coded to maintain confidentiality and anonymity of participants. Data for this study was collected at Greenville High School, which consists of approximately 2320 ninth through tenth graders. The ethnic distribution of students in this school is diverse: American Indian- 0.02%, Asian- 1.4%, Pacific Islander- 0.02%, Filipino- 0.02%, Hispanic- 42.3%, Black- 1.7%, and Anglo- 54%.

Presentation of this data is based on interviews and document analysis. For this study a total of approximately three hours of interviews were conducted. Aside from the principal, interviewees were selected because they were each apart of the interview team that hired principal Morris. The principal interview was conducted at a coffee shop and lasted about an hour and half. Transcribed responses were fifteen pages in length. The interview with the Assistant Superintendents of Personnel lasted approximately forty-five minutes and transcriptions were six pages in length. The Assistant Superintendent of Education Services was interviewed for about twenty minutes and transcriptions were about four pages. Lastly, a teacher from Greenville High School was interviewed for about forty five minutes. Transcriptions from the interview were five pages in length. Additional quotes were received from the principal based upon individual conversations that she had with teachers.

Documents analyzed for this study are the job announcement, application form, principal interview questions, and articles from a local newspaper. To maintain confidentiality, the newspaper is being referred to as the Sun Times, rather than revealing its real name.

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